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ABSTRACT

Using 1980 Census data, a general profile of the educational attainment of six Asian American groups is given here. Data are compared with similar information on Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, and racial/ethnic differences in the proportion of families with school-age children at the poverty level are described. The six Asian American groups considered are Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Indians. For 1980, all these except the Vietnamese exceeded Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in the proportion of the population with a college education; the Vietnamese compared favorably with Blacks and Hispanics. Yet several Asian groups still had substantial proportions with no education or with minimum education (of all, Hispanics had the highest proportion in this category). Asian Americans had the greatest increase in overall educational level during the 1970s, a significant part of this increase being attributable to selective immigration. A much higher proportion of Asian Americans had occupation-education mismatches. And finally, perhaps the most significant finding was that, except for the Japanese, Asian Americans had higher proportions of families with school-age children in the poverty class as compared to Whites. Overall, the superior school achievement of Asian Americans is not associated with their economic milieus. (CMG)

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THE EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF ASIAN AMERICANS: AN UPDATE FROM THE 1980 CENSUS

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This paper has two objectives. The first is to assess the overall educational status of major Asian American groups in comparison with the majority White population and the two largest minority population groups, namely, the Blacks and the Hispanics. Because of their high achievements in socioeconomic status, Asian Americans in recent years have been labelled as a "model minority". The particularly high educational attainment of several Asian American groups is widely publicized by the media. While reports by the media are based on current information, they may not be systematic nor comprehensive, especially in view of the fact that under the general rubric of "Asian Americans", great variability exists among individual groups. At the other hand, studies by scientific investigators, while more systematic and rigorous, are mostly based on earlier census data and the 1976 Survey of Income and Education data (e.g., Hirschman and Wong, 1981; Nishi, 1981). With the 1980 census data available, it is necessary to update our knowledge on the Asian Americans' educational profile, to identify changes since 1970, and to assess where Asian Americans stand in the national context.

Our second objective is to assess the economic milieux of Asian American families with school age children, i.e., children between the ages 6 and 17. We wish to find out how many such families can adequately provide sufficient resources to educate their children without creating undue hardship for the parents. In other words, we argue that when there exist a condition of the scarcity of resources, there is the tension between using the limited funds to take care of the bare necessities, or to invest the money in children's education. When a family has surplus funds, such funds are available for

educational investment but may not be used in such a way. The differential use of surplus funds by individual families depend on the parents' views of the demands of the society on the skills of their children when the latter reach the adult working age. Different racial and ethnic groups may have different views on the probable societal demands on their children's educational requirement partly because of their own personal experiences, and partly because of their values and perceived symbols of success. The allocation of surplus funds by parents usually reflects such values and differential perceptions.

Thus it is too complex a problem to assess the educational values of parents without a sample survey data. The 1980 census, however, does allow the analysis of families at the level, or below the margin, of poverty by ethnicity and by place of birth. For foreign born, there is information on the year of immigration. For the purpose of analyzing the economic ability of parents relative to educational requirements, we assume that when a family falls below the poverty line, there is that added tension to use limited resources for the education of the children at the expense of personal comforts and future economic security. If, at the same time, in spite of the limited resources, children of a particular ethnic origin achieved highly, the poverty cycle hypothesis which has been used by many to describe the ills of minority children must be revised in light of Asian American experiences.

Data and Analysis

Data for this analysis came from the 1970 census reports and the 1980 Census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS). For the six major

Asian American groups, the 5 percent A Sample was used, whereas for the three non-Asian groups, the one-in-one-thousand (1/1,000) B Sample was used. For the 1980, it is able to identify the Hispanic population based on a question on Spanish origin. The terms White and Black here thus refer to non-Spanish origin people. However, for the 1970 data, the racial group "White" is comprised of non-Spanish origin people as well as Spanish origin people. Since Hispanics constitute only a small percentage relative to Whites, the confounding effect should be negligible.

Table 1 gives a general profile of years of education completed for population 25 years old and over by race and ethnicity for both 1970 and 1980. For Asian Americans in 1970, only data on the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Filipinos are available, contrasting the White majority. All three Asian American groups exceeded the White population with respect to the percentage of completing college education. At the other end of the educational spectrum, the Chinese and the Filipino also had conspicuously high percentage of population with no education or with minimum education (1-4 years). The bimodality of educational attainment is intuitively obvious, especially among the Chinese.

For 1980, when we have data on Koreans, Asian Indians, and Vietnamese, we note that all Asian groups except the Vietnamese exceed the Whites, the Blacks and the Hispanics in the proportion of population with a college education. The Asian Indians have the highest percentage (more than one out of every two) of college graduates, followed by the Chinese (37.0 percent), the Filipinos (36.9

Table 1. Years of School Completed for Population 25 Years Old and Over, by Race, 1970 and 1980

Race	N*	Total %	YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED						
				GRADE SCHOOL			HIGH SCHOOL		COLLEGE	
			None	1-4	5-7	8	1-3	4	1-3	4+
1970										
White	98,245,635	100.0	1.4	3.1	9.1	13.0	18.8	32.2	11.1	11.3
Chinese	227,165	100.0	11.1	5.1	10.7	5.6	9.7	21.2	11.0	25.6
Japanese	353,707	100.0	1.8	2.4	6.3	8.5	12.2	39.3	13.6	15.9
Filipino	176,672	100.0	5.6	9.5	11.7	5.1	13.4	19.9	12.4	22.5
1980										
White	109,999	100.0	0.6	1.5	5.4	8.2	14.6	36.2	16.1	17.4
Black	13,013	100.0	1.8	5.8	12.2	7.5	21.7	29.1	13.5	8.3
Hispanics	6,549	100.0	4.6	10.5	16.8	7.9	17.2	24.0	11.4	7.6
Chinese	24,566	100.0	7.1	3.6	7.9	3.0	7.5	19.3	14.6	37.0
Japanese	23,735	100.0	1.1	1.2	3.4	4.5	7.9	35.7	20.0	26.3
Filipino	22,608	100.0	2.1	5.2	7.8	2.4	8.5	18.4	18.9	36.9
Korean	9,280	100.0	3.0	1.1	6.4	3.3	8.1	28.6	15.8	33.9
Asian Indian	12,024	100.0	1.7	1.6	4.2	4.2	8.7	14.5	13.6	51.5
Vietnamese	5,159	100.0	5.6	4.8	10.5	4.2	12.7	29.0	20.7	12.5

*Data for 1970 are based on entire population, whereas data for 1980 are based on samples (5% sample for Asian Americans; one-in-one-thousand B sample for other groups).

percent), the Koreans (33.9 percent) and the Japanese (26.3 percent) in that order. Although the Vietnamese have a lower percentage than the White population (12.5 percent as compared to 17.4 percent), they compare favorably to the Blacks and the Hispanics. Comparing to the 1970 figures, the Whites and the three Asian groups with available data all experienced large increase in the percentage of people with 4 or more years of college education. The Filipinos have the largest increase in terms of both absolute percentage point increase (14.5) and percent increase (64 percent). In view of these statistics, we are persuaded to conclude that indeed Asian Americans have the highest level of education attainment.

Although the percentage with no formal education or with minimum education for the Chinese and the Filipinos saw moderate decline between 1970 and 1980, the bimodality of distribution of education level still manifests as compared to the Whites and even the Black population. The Vietnamese and the Koreans also have sizable proportions of population with no education. When all race and ethnic groups considered, the Hispanics have the highest proportion with no education or minimum education (4.6 + 10.5 = 15.1 percent).

The drastic increase in eductional attainment for Asian Americans between the 1970 and the 1980 censuses came not solely from the higher achievement of the groups within a single decade, but largely from the highly selective immigration of professionals who are well educated. Adult Asian immigrants may benefit from the American eduction system by getting more advanced education, but most of them have a high level of education to start with (Table 2). This is especially true for the

Table 2. Percentage of Population 25 Years Old and Over With 4+ Years of College Education by Race and Nativity/Year of Immigration

Nativity/ Year of Immigration	White	Black	Hispanics	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Filipino	Asian Indian	Vietnamese
U.S. Born	17.5	8.6	7.2	41.5	27.2	26.8	14.8	13.4	-
Year of Immigration									
Before 1950	8.3	10.6	4.8	19.1	6.6	-	5.4	13.2	-
1950-1959	16.7	12.1	8.1	39.2	13.8	56.7	26.1	68.4	-
1960-1964	16.7	20.4	16.1	40.0	14.4	44.7	34.5	76.4	-
1965-1969	19.9	10.1	8.4	42.0	22.6	49.7	50.5	73.1	-
1970-1974	20.1	18.0	5.8	39.0	26.2	33.9	52.8	64.0	16.0
1975-1980	35.0	14.9	5.2	33.0	48.5	28.1	41.6	51.2	11.0

- Ns too small for reliable estimation.

post 1965 immigrants. However, the exact impact of immigration on the increase of educational level is difficult to assess and was not attempted in this analysis. In contrary to the Asian Americans, continued influx of Hispanics immigrants tends to lower the overall educational level of the Spanish speaking population (Jaffe et al., 1980). For the Whites and the Blacks, which have low levels of immigration, increases in education level between the two censuses, especially in proportion of college graduates, reflects pretty much the amount of upward achievements over the past decade.

The educational advantages of Asian Americans, enumerated above, do not necessarily imply economic advantages as commonly assumed. The general perception that equates economic advantages with educational advantages is based on the assumption of equitable conversion of eductional achievements into economic gains. Some evidence suggests that for many Asian Americans, the economic rewards of education is limited compared to that of majority individuals and that of non-Asian minority groups. Indeed, reports based on earlier census data and the 1976 Survey of Income and Education (e.g., U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, 1978; Woodrum, 1981) have shown that for Japanese and Chinese Americans, both the occupational returns of their educational achievement, and the income returns of their educational and occupational achievement are lower than that for the White majority. Occupational and income returns for the Filipinos are similar to that for the Whites, whereas data for other Asian American groups are not available. While the issues on income return is controversial and involve a more sophisticated approach, this analysis only deals with

the match and mismatch of occupation and education across race and ethnic groups. To accomplish this task, a simple two by two cell typology is used.

EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	
	Professional, Administrtive, & Managerial	Others
4+ years of college	A	B
Less than 4+ yrs of college	C	D

A: occupation matches with eduction attainment

B: mistmatch - underutilization of education

C: occupational achievement beyond educational credentials

D: lower occupation matches with lower education

As Table 3 indicates, most Asian American groups are disadvantaged in the form of B cell mismatch, i.e., underutilization of education for their employment. Since this typology is based on broad classifications of education and occupation, it tends to be conservative rather than definitive, i.e., it tends to understate the degree of mismatch. In other words, any substantial difference in B between a particular group (s) and the majority implies real disadvantages in achieving economic (through occupation) parity.

On the other hand, Asian Americans are in a favorable position in the form of C, i.e., occupational achievement beyond educational credentials, except for the Koreans and the Vietnamese. Tabulations of detailed occupation data and class of worker data for those in this category, however, reveal that the majority of Asian Americans are

Table 3. Education and Occupation Match and Mismatch by Race, 1980

Education-Occupation	White	Black	Hispanics	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Filipino	Asian Indian	Vietnamese
With 4+ years of College Education									
Professional, Administrative and Managerial	67.9	67.8	59.8	61.6	63.7	48.4	49.5	67.5	50.6
Other occupations	32.1	32.2	40.2	38.4	36.3	51.6	50.5	32.5	49.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(16,743)	(973)	(443)	(8,183)	(5,658)	(2,701)	(7,650)	(5,545)	(589)
With Less than 4 years of College Education									
Professional, Administrative and Managerial	14.6	7.9	7.6	14.8	15.1	11.7	19.5	19.0	8.8
Other occupations	85.4	92.1	92.4	85.2	84.9	88.3	80.5	81.0	91.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(62,793)	(8,414)	(4,502)	(11,620)	(12,988)	(4,590)	(9,973)	(3,624)	(3,285)

located at the lower end of the professional and the administrative and managerial rank, and that Asian Americans have higher proportions of self-employed than all non-Asian groups. This finding reflects upon the increasingly prosperous small ethnic business among several Asian American groups. Self-employed small business allows more chances for upward mobility since it is less constrainted by the American occupational structure and its associated mobility channels. At the same time, it contributes little to the structural assimilation of an immigrant group.

We now turn to our second objective. To operationalize the concept of economic miliuex, we used the ratio of family income to the poverty cutoffs. The poverty cutoffs, developed by the Social Security Administration and used by the federal government since the 1960s, are a set of thresholds showing the income needed for basic living expenses, and in particular for a nutritionally adequate diet (Appendix A). A ratio of less than one puts the household in the poverty category. Families which are below the poverty line, no doubt will have extraordinary hardship in allocating resources for educating the younger generation.

Table 4 and Table 5 respectively show the percentage of families with school-age children below or around the poverty level by race and ethnicity, place of bith and year of immigration. It became clear that, except the Japanese and the Filipinos, all other groups have a higher percentage of families below poverty line as compared with the Whites (Table 4). The Chinese and the Koreans are somewhat below the Whites, but are far better off than the Blacks and the Hispanics. On

Table 4. Poverty Level by Race for School Aged Children (6-17 years old), 1980

Poverty Level	White	Black	Hispanics	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Filipino	Asian Indian	Vietnamese
Below poverty cut-off	10.0	35.6	31.4	15.7	4.2	12.0	6.2	10.2	43.4
Ratio of 1.00-1.99 of poverty cut-off	18.6	29.9	29.7	22.6	8.9	22.9	20.0	13.5	28.6
Ratio of 2.00+ of poverty cut-off	71.4	34.5	38.9	61.7	86.9	65.1	73.8	76.3	28.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(32,731)	(6,375)	(3,774)	(6,704)	(4,425)	(3,303)	(7,513)	(3,220)	(3,283)

the other hand, the Vietnamese, being the newest major immigrant groups among Asians, have the highest of below poverty cutoff families with school-age children (43.4 percent). Although data on other groups of Southeast Asian refugees are not available for this analysis, it is reasonable to assume that their poverty levels are higher than, or at least equivalent to, the Vietnamese level, since the Vietnamese are the most established groups among them. In other words, when the economic resources for school-age children of Southest Asian refugees are concerened, the Vietnamese poverty level can serve as the lower bound.

The case of Vietnamese deserves more explication. For those who argue that there is a waiting time between date of immigration and income attainment, the time lag may be reflected in the Vietnamese case. In order to verify the assumption, Table 5 shows the percent families with school-age children in poverty by the year of immigration. We found that those who came between 1975, or about the same time as did the Vietnamese, and 1980, the percentage of below poverty line families is the highest among the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Filipinos, as well as among the Asian Indians. The difference between those who came within one decade and previous time periods is so significant that no statistical test is necessary. The only exception is the Japanese Americans. Since Japan virtually has ceased to be an emmigrant country, the lack of difference between the 1975-80 period with earlier periods is largely attributed to the low level of, and extremely selective, Japanese immigration to the U.S.

Table 5. Percent of Asian American School Age Children (6-17 years old) Below Poverty Level by their Parents' Year of Immigration

Parent's Year of Immigration	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Filipino	Asian Indian	Vietnamese
Born in U.S.	5.7	2.7	3.6	11.0	21.6	--
Year of Immigration						
Before 1965	7.2	9.6	4.5	5.2	5.0	--
1965-1974	11.3	6.2	8.0	3.9	4.8	30.3
1975-1980	38.8	9.4	19.5	11.6	23.2	43.9

--N's too small

Summary and Discussion

Based on the 1980 Census sample data, we have depicted the general profile of the educational attainment for six Asian American groups and three non-Asian groups, and have assessed the race/ethnic differences in the poverty level for families with school-age children. It is no doubt that several major Asian American groups have the highest level of educational attainment, especially in terms of percentage of college graduates. Yet the Vietnamese and presumably other groups of Southeast Asian refugees as well, are still far from achieving the said educational advantages. Furthermore, several Asian groups including the Chinese, still have substantial proportions with no education or with minimum education. Asian Americans also experienced a great deal of increase in their overall educational level during the 1970s. A significant part of this increase is obviously attributed to the selective immigration of the well educated from Asian countries. Our data also revealed much higher proportions of Asian American than other groups in terms of occupation-education mismatch. The key educational probelms for Asian Americans, therefore, are more on the effective utilization of education instead of educational attainment per se.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this analysis is that except the Japanese, Asian Americans have higher level of families with school-age children in the poverty class as compared to the Whites. This is somewhat surprising in view of the common perception of "model minority" and the well established fact that Asian children, regardless of national origin, have superior school performance across the country. This issue thus deserves more discussion.

There are three major explanations of the high achievant behavior of Asian American children in schools. First, according to Blackwell, most Asian children came from highly educated families with considerable resources for children to be familiar with educational tools, particularly with computer terminals at home. It is the home milieu which propel Asian American children into the world of science and technology. Blackwell's observation is partially selective, influenced by his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts and around Boston area where prestigious institutions have taken in considerably higher percentage of Asian American freshmen in the past decade. A different arguement posited that all immigrant children are characterized by the "immigrant rigor" when aspiration level is raised by the knowledge of other people's success stories. Asians, being the newest immigrants, would then be included in that category. A third explanation came from Caudill's earlier work on Japanese children when he posited that high scholastic achievement came from the sense of guilt over the sacrifice of parents, a thesis which had been repeatedly confirmed by other researchers (Caudill, 1962; DeVos, 1960). The immigrant rigor hypothesis needs little further discussion. We learned, for example, that even for European immigrants in the early part of the present century, there had been a differential pace of social mobility between the East European Jews and Southern European Italian immigrants in spite of the fact that these two groups arrived about the same time. The "rigor" so pronounced among immigrant families must be explained by some other factors, as Strodtbeck (1958) argued, such as familial patterns, etc.

In spite of much write up on the psychological explanation of the Asian success stories in schools, there still exist the myth that Asian parents are well off since they came from the professional background as a result of the selective immigration policy and the widely known cases of "brain drain" from Asian countries. The 1980 Census may not dispute or support such arguments, but the data presented here can at least show that the phenomenon of the "well off" Asian children may not be the case. The data, however, cannot be used to make inferences on the high scholastic achievement relative to the other two hypotheses. We submit that ideally we should have data on scholastic achievement as dependent variables in order to avoid possible ecological fallacy. We do not have such data at this time. The findings in this analysis, however, does suggest that at the group level, the superior school achievement of Asian American school children is not associated with their economic milieux.

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Appendix A. Poverty Cutoffs in 1979

Size of Family Unit	Weighted Average Thresholds	Related Children Under 18 Years								
		None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 or more
1 person (unrelated individual)	$ 3,686									
under 65 years	3,774	$ 3,774								
65 years and over	3,479	3,479								
2 persons	4,723									
householder under 65 years	4,876	4,858	$ 5,000							
householder 65 years and over	4,389	4,385	4,981							
3 persons	5,787	5,674	5,839	$ 5,844						
4 persons	7,412	7,482	7,605	7,356	$ 7,382					
5 persons	8,776	9,023	9,154	8,874	8,657	$ 8,525				
6 persons	9,915	10,378	10,419	10,205	9,999	9,693	$ 9,512			
7 persons	11,237	11,941	12,016	11,759	11,580	11,246	10,857	$10,429		
8 persons	12,484	13,356	13,473	13,231	13,018	12,717	12,334	11,936	$11,835	
9 or more persons	14,812	16,066	16,144	15,929	15,749	15,453	15,046	14,677	14,586	$14,024